

name: Mr. John Earl  
address: 3917 Murphy Drive NW  
apartment:  
city: Gig Harbor  
state: Washington  
zip: 98335  
email: johntearl@earthlink.net  
phone: 206-669-3336  
fax:

Comments: Public Comments from John Earl

As the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Citizen Advisory Committee considers the tolling structure for the new bridge, I understand that the amount of the toll (for the first year at least) is pretty well established. I also understand from public statements and my own calculations that a \$3.00 toll is just a temporary, introductory, toll so the public can ease into the idea of paying tolls on this bridge. So I would like to direct your attention to the other major area where you can impact the lives of the toll payers and the rate at which the bonds are repaid: Toll discounts and exemptions.

I urge the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Citizen Advisory Committee to take a minimalist approach when recommending discounts or exemptions from the standard tolling structure on the Tacoma narrows Bridge. For all of the various groups that might petition this committee for relief, the committee should weigh their cases against the realism that each discount or exemption acts as a toll increase for all other full fare paying users of the bridge. Discounts to one group will increase the time it takes for all other groups to pay off the bonds, and increase the likelihood and frequency of future toll rate hikes. Any group of users who are exempted from Bridge tolls are also more likely undervalue, and overuse, the bridge because the value and the cost of bridge use will be distorted in their worlds.

There are also enormous problems with implementation and enforcement of disparate bridge tolls. If you were to provide an exemption for any group of users, how could you prevent someone else from abusing that exemption? For example, I have a student driver in my household, and I live next door to my parents. If you provide exemptions for Seniors and Students, would I be abusing the system I sent my son on a non-school related errand across the Bridge? What if I borrowed my father's pickup for a hardware store run? An unscrupulous person might drive his father's pickup to work every day and leave his own car home for Dad's use. A desperate senior or a starving student might agree to register someone else's car in their name. Would exempted persons also receive proportional exemptions on Washington State Ferry Routes so as not to influence traffic towards the bridge? Any and every discount or exemption you consider will invariably complicate the system and create openings for abuse.

The more exemptions you create the more likely you are to invite abuse. Every hole you drill in the fabric of the system lessens the integrity entire system

Below is a list of groups that I have heard mentioned as candidates for special treatment. Because I know this committee will hear myriad reasons to exempt various groups, and because public meeting often lack balance when

considering how to spend public money, I have taken the liberty of listing some of the reasons not to exempt these groups.

For some of these groups, the committee might consider a hardship case process for individuals (not blanket groups) for whom the toll is an unbearable burden. I am not opposed to providing relief to the truly needy based on individual situations. However, I do believe it is difficult to define an entire category of people who are all needy, and prevent opportunists and rent seekers from taking advantage of the public largess.

#### Senior Citizens

A Senior Citizen exemption or discount assumes that all seniors are of limited means, which we know to be not true. Many seniors have done an excellent job of retirement planning and are as able, or more able, to afford a toll as young working families. Also because most seniors are (almost by definition) retired, their number and frequency of tolls paid would be far less than the average commuter. A blanket exemption or discount for Senior Citizens is not warranted. It should be possible for individual seniors to apply for discounts under a hardship procedure.

#### Students

Not every, nor even most, students are without the means to pay the toll. Again a blanket exemption is unwarranted here. If a 12 year old student is transported to private school each day, would the parent driver earn the discount even though they must cross the bridge for work? If an adult student receives an exemption, would it be only for trips to and from school, or would exempted trips include visits to his girlfriend, his favorite campus watering hole, and the pizza delivery job he has at night?

If a student deferment is felt to be necessary, abuse can be minimized by creating a "Student Loan" system that required the tolls to be paid back from future earnings. This would have an economizing effect on Student's trips across the bridge and retain the value of the bridge crossing for the student.

#### City and County Vehicles

Approximately 1.1 million voters in Pierce, King, Thurston, Kitsap, Clallam and Jefferson counties (and possibly others) were asked whether tolling the bridge was a good idea and the majority responded in the affirmative. Because those voters finance county vehicles and their operations, the Committee should assume that voters intended to tax themselves this paltry amount, and honor their wishes. This will be one of the very small ways that voters in Federal Way, Tenino, Enumclaw and Forks have of contributing to the toll bridge they helped to create.

#### State Vehicles

The same argument applies for State vehicles. Add to this argument the fact that this is the only toll road in the state, and the toll largely affects only residents of the Gig Harbor, Key and Kitsap Peninsulas, the Committee should not accept the argument that causing state vehicles to pay tolls is simply the state moving money from one pocket to the next. When the Governor's motorcade crosses the Narrows Bridge, every car (including State Patrol vehicles) should be sporting a Good-to-Go pass.

#### Emergency Vehicles

On this point I aim to stretch your thinking a bit, but am cognizant that this will be a very hard sell because of reflex beliefs that most people

hold. While it may seem logical to exempt emergency vehicles, there really is no practical reason to do so. Under older tolling systems, a strong reason to exempt Emergency Vehicles was to prevent them from having to stop to pay tolls. The Good-to-Go technology makes the toll paying process completely unobtrusive, eliminating this concern. It is not practical to exempt emergency vehicles only when they are operating in an emergency capacity. And besides, if you can find your way to recommend that every state, county and city vehicle (including emergency vehicles) carry a good to go pass, it will be much easier to rebuff exemption requests from all other seekers.

#### Transit Busses and Carpools

Providing exemptions and discounts to transit Busses and Carpools has been mentioned as an incentive for more people to use mass transportation. These commuters will already receive a discount by sharing the cost of one trip among many riders. If that isn't incentive enough, the fact that the entire net increase in capacity on the bridges (one carpool lane each way) is dedicated to mass transportation is well beyond the maximum special treatment any other group receives.

#### Bridge and D.O.T. employees.

Below is an excerpt from a column that will be published Wednesday, January 3rd in the Peninsula Gateway. I will be happy to forward the entire article electronically to anyone who would like a copy. It will also be available on newsstands Wednesday morning.

Of all the groups that should NOT receive exemptions, managers and employees of the Toll Bridge and the D.O.T. should be at the top of the list. No other single action the Citizens Advisory Committee can take will do more to improve the daily operation of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Nothing will instruct bridge employees more powerfully, or more quickly, on the strengths and weaknesses of their system. Experience has shown that when the employees of an organization are required to "eat their own cooking" - to live within the confines of the structures that they have created - they understand their business and their customers better. The Committee should not deprive bridge managers and employees of the daily experience of using their own product under the same conditions as their customers.

I encourage members of the committee to contact me if they have any questions or wish for clarification on any of these points.

Thank you,

jte

John Earl  
3917 Murphy Drive NW  
Gig Harbor, WA 98335  
johntearl@earthlink.net  
206-669-3336